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THE MESSAGE OF PEACE

R. W. CHURCH

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THE
MESSAGE OF PEACE

BY

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THE MESSAGE OF PEACE.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men."—ST. LUKE ii. 14.

THE Song of the Angels was the first public preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Its advent had been announced privately to those who were elected to be its instrument, in dream and vision, in angelic salutation, in inspirations of the Holy Ghost. To Zacharias in the Temple, to Mary in the secret chamber, in the night watches to Joseph, in the joy of her unborn child to Elisabeth, the assurance of its approach had been given. It had been recognized and welcomed in words such as had never yet burst from the hearts of men, from human gladness, from human hope—"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people," and among those unknown and hidden souls who were called

to bear its first glory and its first burden, its special significance was proclaimed. "Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

But beyond the sacred home at Nazareth, and in the priestly city in the hill-country of Judah, the first announcement to those outside, to the representatives of those "poor to whom the Gospel was to be preached," was in the angelic visit and the angelic "Gospel of great joy," to the shepherds who were watching in the fields where the patriarchs had fed their flocks. Their hymn of praise, which was the first news to the world that its Saviour was come, was also the first note in that triumphant song of deliverance, which was taken up by the Church below, to be continued day by day through the centuries over all the earth, and never to cease till it shall swell into the "new song" of the Church above. With the Lord's Prayer, with the Magnificat and Benedictus and Nunc Dimittis, it became a stated and necessary part of the public language of the Church in its most solemn worship. In its highest offering of

Eucharistic praise, the words of the Seraphim in the Temple under the Old Dispensation, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, are answered by those of the Angels around Bethlehem in the New—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men."

"On earth peace." That was what the Angels saw of special significance to mankind, in the "glad tidings" which they announced. It was a message of peace: may we not on Christmas Day spend a few minutes in thinking of what so filled the thoughts and quickened the joy of the Angels?

"The Gospel a message of peace." I am afraid that in not a few who hear such words, they may raise a smile. They will think of the course of history to this hour, and ask whether it does not furnish a comment of the most supreme irony on the words and claims of the "Gospel of peace." They will ask whether it has brought peace into the distracted and disturbed souls and thoughts of men, torn and divided between counter appearances, by conflicting proofs, by irreconcilable trains of reasoning, by opposing forms and tendencies of their own nature? They will ask whether it ever yet reconciled the

world,—all its sins, its mistakes, its wishes and strivings for better things, its incorrigible faults, with God its maker, its hope, its fear? Is that great body of mankind which St. Paul described as alienated from God and at enmity with Him through wicked works, now after all the long years really more at peace with Him? reconciled to His government, to His righteousness, to His claims? What shall we say of that "vision of peace," which was ever before the minds of the prophets, and that peace which was the solemn and parting bequest of our Master, which was the perpetual benediction and salutation of apostles to all Christian souls? How much of that "peace of God which passeth all understanding," which is invoked weekly and daily upon us, to go with us when we pass from God's altar or His sanctuary, really descends upon our Christian society? True, Jesus Christ said also Himself, that He came to bring not peace but a sword: His life was a life of conflict, of war without rest or pause against opposing evil. But is it only the conflict between *good* and evil which disturbs peace? Is it only the war between Christ and Belial—is *that* the simple and sufficient account of the quarrels and divisions of men,

of the jars and hatreds which fill the souls, and which like the troubled sea can never rest? Is this enough to account for the animosities of neighborhoods, of social circles, of classes, of parties, of Churches? Is it credible that in these enmities, the good and the certainty should be all on one side, and the evil and the mistakes all on the other? Is *this* really the "sword," which Jesus Christ said that He came to bring—the sword against nothing but unrighteousness and sin? or is it not rather the negative of the peace which He loves and which He gave us, the peace which He died to purchase and plant in the world, the peace which is His supreme and Eternal blessing to all that live? I do not ask these questions now to look for their answer, or to seek for the account to be given of the strange contrast between the Gospel message of peace, and the palpable facts of history and social life. That is not the business of to-day. But I *do* ask them, in order to help this day's services to bring home to our own separate consciences the fact itself of this contrast. I ask them that each one of us may honestly put it to himself, "what part have I in the faults that *must* be somewhere? How much am I to blame for this

ugly and hateful thwarting of the purpose of God?"

We cannot perhaps go into the tangled skein of sins and mistakes, and necessities created by sins, which have in the course of ages so strongly turned aside the fulfilment of the Gospel of peace, and brought us to where we are—quarrelling, fighting, seeing nothing inconsistent and perplexing in violence, revenge, destruction. But we can do *this*. We can do something to see that our own hearts, and consciences, and thoughts, have before them the true standard and ideal of peace, which was one of the new characteristics of the Gospel announced by the Angels. We can, for ourselves, train and bridle feelings and impulses, in the serious belief that Christ means us in every way that is possible, as a great and paramount duty, to follow peace. If anything is certain, it is that a peaceful temper, a temper which loves, and honors, and desires peace, is of the essence of the Christian character. "Follow peace with all men," says the apostle, "and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord."

"Peace and purity." These are the two capital points in which the Gospel was an

innovation and revelation in the moral standard of the ancient world. The ancient world had noble, if imperfect, ideas of courage, of justice; it had noble thoughts of friendship; it had noble conceptions of public duty and of a man's debt to his country. But it looked upon war and conflict as the natural field for the highest virtues, as it looked upon purity as a matter of varying expediency and uncertain sentiment. It looked on the world as a battle-field for the trial of strength between nations and men, as science would sometimes fain see in the struggle for life an account of the natural world as we find it. It had no misgivings about strife and war: they were what men were born to by the law of their existence, conditions which none could alter which none with honor could escape from. It was a great reversal of all accepted moral judgment, of all popular traditions, of all current assumptions, when the teaching of the Gospel put in the forefront of its message, God's value for peace, and His blessing upon it; when it placed peace as a divine and magnificent object to be aimed at and sought for, with the earnestness with which men aimed at glory. When it set high among its own new Beatitudes, high among the tempers and vir-

tues which were to renew mankind, the spirit, the self-restraints, which make for peace. As it made us know what God thinks of purity, so it made us know what God thinks of peace. And both announcements were, in the strength with which they were made, surprises to the world. Both were corrections of men's natural and long accepted ideas. Both raised the imperfect moral standards of men to a divinely-sanctioned height, and however in practice Christians may have fallen short of them, these standards of what is true and right never have been, and never can be lowered.

It is a truism that Christianity is a religion of peace. It is also a truism that Christians have often made it a religion of quarrels, persecutions, and bloodshed, and that custom makes us strangely insensible to the anomaly of a religion of peace, compatible with strife, tolerant of litigation, patient of war. The Church—not the world only, but the Church and Christian society, seems to have disappointed the hopes of Apostles, seems to have persisted in the path which the Prince of Peace came to lead it from. But however God may allow His purposes to be crossed by the weakness and disobedience and perverse-

ness of man, what we individually have to consider is, whether we will associate ourselves with what we know to be His voice; or whether we will ignore it, neglect it, prefer to it ideals of our own, measures of right which are not His. You say that you cannot make the world other than it is. Of course you cannot: the world is not given you either to understand, or to govern, or to change. But there is one thing which you can do, you can prevent yourself from being like the world in its evil.—True, indeed, amid its fierce jarring elements, its passions that none can tame, its imperious public opinion, its long settled customs, its fixed rules of honor, of expediency, of prudence, of interest, its vast and scientific machinery, created only because of the vast scale on which men and nations do carry on their implacable quarrels, the strongest may well feel powerless—as powerless as we feel amid the irresistible forces of nature. True also, there are other virtues besides those of peace. There are for Christ's disciples, the virtues, and there are the occasions, of resistance, of conflict, of attack, of war without truce, not merely in the religious, but in the political and secular sphere of duty. It would be an evil day when

a Christian became deaf to the public call on his manliness, his courage, his daring, his self-devotion. There are solemn times when he has not only to die, but to fight and make others die. These are times when, for the sake of his brethren, for the sake of truth, for the sake of his Master, he must resist evil, falsehood, disobedience, wrong. Yet for all this, it remains true that Christ's religion is the religion of peace; and till we feel how serious and earnest the New Testament is in the honor which it gives to peace, we have missed its spirit. If, while this world lasts, the divisions of mankind are too strong for peace, if in the struggle of "mighty opposites" our strength goes for nothing, at least we, each one of us, are lords over ourselves. One thing, at least whatever else is not, is given over to our power: our heart and will. In this little corner of the world we hold dominion. This drop, it may be, in the stream of influence is ours to deal with; is ours to be responsible for. Whether we will or no, men round us, our friends perhaps, will quarrel, and take and give offence, and heap up wrongs, and settle into estrangement, and lose all power of doing justice to one another; step by step endurance is exhausted, and

honor is supposed to be touched, and the law, perhaps, is appealed to, and the wound to peace becomes incurable. We look on and judge; we cannot, it may be, prevent it; but at least we can be warned, we can help imitating it. Again, whether we will or no, religious dissension will continue to set the world in flame. Apostles themselves were not able to bridle it; and in its train, the bitterest rancor still justifies itself under the name of zeal for God's truth, and injustice and persecution are defended out of jealousy for His honor. We cannot stop heresies, schism, divisions: we cannot chain down party spirit, and make men fair; but at least in these inevitable differences of thought and conviction, we can take care of our own hearts: we need not be little because others are: we need not be unfair, because others are: we need not forget our own short-sightedness, our prejudices, our own obligation to the great law of charity and justice, because others have no misgivings in their judgment, and no limits to their hatreds. Again, whether we will or no, the day is doubtless far distant, when the nations will not learn war any more: it is something, that some slight and imperfect approaches

have been made to it; but we are told only too truly that it is a dream to think that it is yet coming. But for all that, the Song of the Angels is God's supreme benediction to the earth, "on earth peace, good will towards men." In all that, the King of all the ages, the Lord of Hosts, is the "Prince of Peace." Surely when He speaks of peace, He *means* peace; He means the tempers of peace, the moderation and self-restraint of peace, the strong sense of equity, the curbing of ambition, the aversion to boastfulness, and violence, and insolent self-assertion, which are the conditions and pledges of peace. What will He say, at His judgment seat, of the great swelling words of pride and defiance of which history is full? What will He say of those national antipathies and hatreds, so lightly and easily kindled, so obstinate when once kindled, so unreasoning, so ignorant, so absolutely proof to argument or remonstrance, which have turned the fairest lands of the world into fields of blood? Will He accept, at the bar of Eternal justice, as a plea for precipitate and needless wars, the "proud instincts of an imperial race?" No, if we know anything of the mind of Jesus Christ, He will not. Such things may be

utterly out of our power to hinder or influence. Such things may be right, as a philosophy which denies or refuses Jesus Christ, and accepts as the best that old world which He came to change, and transform, and renew. But we Christians, who shall have to give an account for every idle word, we shall surely have to give an account for every vainglorious, every reckless, every insolent word, by which, in our businesss, our religion, our conduct as citizens, our social relations, our many contests, peace has been endangered, or has been made more difficult.

May God keep us ever from trifling with that sacred name of peace. May He keep us from undervaluing it, in comparison with our own aims and purposes, even though disinterested and high. May He keep us from thinking lightly of what *He* loves so well: what He has made the symbol and crown of His great work of mercy to man; which He has inspired all His servants, psalmist and prophet, Angels and apostles, to desire and long for, and rejoice in: in which His Son sums up His complete gift and blessing to His redeemed. "Peace on earth." "Peace I leave with you." "Peace be unto you." "The peace of God which passeth all under-

standing." Do not let any one cheat us out of our inheritance of peace, tempt us from our duty to peace, by saying that God means peace for Heaven, not for earth. He means it for time as well as for eternity. It belongs to those who *will have* it, who are in earnest about it—*outwardly*, much more than men choose to believe—inwardly, altogether. Let us in the name of the God of peace defy the mocking voices, which appeal to experience to prove that the world can be but a great scene of strife, that none but enthusiasts can dream here of peace. That will be according as we master—and by God's grace we *can* master—the powers of evil which are enemies to peace.

"Whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even from your lusts that war in your members?" "The works of the flesh are manifest—hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings." What Christian can dare to say that the works of the spirit are beyond his attainment, beyond his trying—"love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"? And where these are, *there*, in the words of another apostle, "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace, by them that make peace."

Surely not sown in vain, even in the midst of this wilful and troublesome world. Let us listen in earnest to this last great word, which the departing year once more repeats from the mouths of the Angels. Let us be sure that we hear in them the very will of God, the very heart's desire of Jesus Christ. Let us be sure that in them is a secret message, a warning, or encouragement to each one of our own consciences. The religion which comes to us from Bethlehem and from Calvary is, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace."

May the God of peace who loved us all with such wondrous love, teach us something of that blessed Gospel. May He forgive us all those miserable, those amazing littlenesses, so mean yet so fatal; the jealousies, the irritability, the sensitiveness, the guilty selfishnesses, by whatever fine names we call them, to which we so wantonly sacrifice His holy peace.

May He pardon us our careless, or disdainful, or treacherous words against what is so sacred in His eyes. May He answer our prayer in the largeness of His generous mercy, beyond the meaning we ourselves put upon it. "O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, Grant us thy Peace."

MAN'S IDEALS.

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"Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."—GAL. iv. 3–5.

CHRISTMAS, with its tender and bright, and touching, and humbling thoughts, brings with it the remembrance of the profound change in the nature and position of man, which followed on the coming of the Son of God in the flesh. God came and visited His creatures, "and was made man." Henceforth, man is what God his Maker has been. He has that nature, he lives that life, he dies that death, which he has in common with the awful Being who was born in Bethlehem, and is to judge him. From that time man was lifted up to a level far above anything that this world of time had ever known. A new order began, which had not been before. It is spoken of in St. Paul as a

"new creation," "a new man." If we think of what St. Paul teaches of this great change, consequent on the Incarnation, and caused by it, the words, strong as they are, are not too strong.

The results, the developments of this great change, have, we know, changed all human history. Far beyond their direct and acknowledged influence, they have swayed the world and its movements. They have penetrated far and wide into all human life, all human ideas, all human character, and activity, and motive. They have altered the proportions and the meaning of our present stage of being. They have made it at once, infinitely more sacred and precious, and infinitely of less account. They have turned the eternal farewells of death into the tender commendations to Christ's mercy and forgiveness and peace, and into the transporting hope of the vision of God. Great, and manifold, and inexhaustible are the workings in mankind of that change, of which human language cannot adequately give the measure. For a few moments this morning, I will say a few words about one of them.

Consider, then, what has happened, since that coming in the flesh which we are think-

ing of to-day, in relation to the Ideal of man; the Ideal of what he should be, of his character, of his perfection; the Ideal of man before Christ came to us; the Ideal of man since we have known Him, and He has been with us.

1. Man has never been able to live without his Ideal. The wildest savages, the rudest barbarians, have their ideals, as well as we, of what man should be. But the ideal of the natural man, of man before the great change of the Gospel, could be a high and noble one. There was such an ideal when human society rose step by step out of brutality and license into the great civilized states of the heathen world, when the love of one's fellow-men showed itself in the form of enthusiastic loyalty to that country which embraced them all; when the state was the object of affection and devotion; when a common citizenship was the great acknowledged bond; public-spirited readiness to do and to sacrifice anything for one's country was the height—and who can deny that it was a very noble one—of human goodness. Nay, there was something known, even beyond that, though it was a unique and barren instance; but men had known and learned to admire and honor,

but not to imitate, one who had, like Socrates, died for the Truth, and died to do good to those who slew him. Courage, patriotism, honor, self-sacrifice for the right, and a care for all the ties of kindred and the tendernesses of friendship, were no unworthy ideals; and they were the ideals of Greece and Rome. Justice, and fortitude, and self-mastery, and wisdom, and duty faithfully and exactly discharged at any cost, were the standard already acknowledged there, by unregenerate men. They were compatible with much that lowered and spoiled them. They were often in fact associated with terrible sins; but often, to our own shame and humiliation, men who knew not our Lord, recognized their obligations, and partially fulfilled them. These were the ideals of the West, of those from whom we have inherited our traditions of social right and order. The ideals which men reached to in the East were even more remarkable. Centuries before our Lord came there was a great religious reformation in India. We know it by the name of Buddhism. The ideal of this was complete sacrifice of all that was pleasant to flesh and blood, for the sake of the soul—to deliver the soul from the passions, and ignorance, and

slavery, and burdens of this mortality. And it was accompanied by two things: the most passionate enthusiasm to communicate with, and so to help and deliver others; and a spirit of tender and all-embracing kindness, which expressed itself in the most touching language, and embodied itself in the most touching acts; which sought out the forlorn and the miserable, and which willingly associated itself with the degradation of the outcast, and with the shame and doom of the sinner. This ideal did once exist among men, however soon it came to be alloyed with superstition, and hardened into formalism; however little it actually was able to raise and to console men; however mixed it was with fantastic extravagances which we here are not able to understand. It was a law of action which prescribed to itself, in spirit and will, the meaning of the Second Table of the Decalogue; which required a man to keep nothing for himself, but to spend and be spent for others; which required him to hide every good deed, and to make the most open and minute avowal of all his faults; which demanded from the proudest and the mightiest the confession of that common lot of error and sin and weakness which they

shared with the humblest; which could inspire the love and the courage of the martyr, and give power over the hearts of men, and teach the lesson of noble resignation and obedience, and raise up a great company of preachers, as gentle and tolerant as they were earnest and unwearied. Such an ideal was presented to the men of the East before our Lord appeared.

These ideals, different as they are, are the greatest that history shows us in the Gentile world, before the Incarnation, and there was this feature common to all of them. They almost, or altogether, left out God. Not but that the name of God, and still more, the names of "Gods many and Lords many," were on men's lips, and the memorials of them before their eyes. Not that the awful and mysterious name of God did not awaken in the serious Greek or Roman the presage of his Maker, his Ruler, the Judge of right, the Avenger of wrong. But his moral Ideal stood by itself, on its own foundations. It did not need God. It did not aspire to God. It did without Him. And to the highest ideals of the East, God was not even an imagination or a name. With the deep and spiritual meaning which they read into what are the

Commandments of the Second Table, they were absolutely and resolutely blind to the First. The world to them was "empty," except of evil; to these ascetics of self-conquest, beneficence, and patient humility, it was "empty even of God." And their highest hope was not immortality, but annihilation.

Great and wonderful and sometimes overpowering are all these fragmentary forms of goodness—reflections of the mind of the All-perfect, when we meet with them in the old world—"Light shining in the darkness, and the darkness comprehending it not." Let us thank God that even to them who knew Him not His Spirit witnessed in their hearts and consciences to His Law and Righteousness: —witnessed for justice, for purity, for humility, for loving-kindness, for an unselfish and public zeal. Why should we not acknowledge and reverence them, though they were so evanescent, though they failed to perpetuate themselves, though they were so maimed and imperfect, though they had no spring in them of recovery and self-correction? They were for their time. But they had no root. They blossomed, and withered away, and left no fruit. Yet God was pleased to be patient

with what St. Paul calls "the times of this ignorance," till "the fulness of the time was come." We may look back at them, and their history, in silent awe, and leave them in His hands till He comes to judgment.

But to us the "times of ignorance" are past. There had been an ideal of man in the world all the while of a very different kind. One family of mankind had preserved the great faith that man was the object of God's care and love, and that he was fit to be the object of God's care. Promise and legislation and history, the songs and complaints and raptures of Psalmists, the terrible lessons and unearthly visions of Prophets, had kept up this faith. One great theme, in every conceivable variation, sounds through the whole of the Old Testament, and it is this: "O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee, my flesh also longeth after Thee, in a barren and dry land where no water is. Thus have I looked for Thee in holiness, that I might behold Thy power and glory. For Thy loving kindness is better than the life itself: my lips shall praise Thee." "Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God: when shall

I come to appear before the presence of God?" Man was made to know and to love the living God; and the living God, who had made man, meant Himself to be known and loved by His creature. Man was lifted up from being the head of the visible creation here: from being the noblest and most richly endowed with gifts and powers of all living things on earth, and also, *because* so great in his instincts and aspirations and yet so weak and frail, really the unhappiest—he was lifted up to feel that he belonged to a world beyond the bounds of mortality and sight; that he had to do with the righteousness and the love of the Everlasting and the All-merciful; that he might hope, in spite of sin and pain and death, to be of the family of the Holiest, in the "land of the living." Long before our Lord came, the foundation of man's ideal had been laid in the first and great commandment —"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." According as man is called to do this, and is supposed capable of doing it, the ideal of man varies by a difference that nothing can bridge over.

And at last God's time came. "In the be-

ginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth: and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father. He came to His own, and His own received Him not. But to as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the children of God, to them that believe on His name." Such a revelation—such an opening of the unseen and eternal world—could not be, without a corresponding change in the standard and idea of what man was, of what he should be. It is shown in every page and every line of the New Testament.

For now, not to one family and nation, but to the whole world of mankind, was to be declared the relation in which man stood to God: that man might know God, and love God, and be knit and bound to God by the closest and most real of ties. That relation to the Father, dim in Western morality, lost in Eastern morality, was henceforth to occupy its due and natural and commanding place, in the thoughts and feelings of mankind. The huge gap in man's idea of his life was filled up. Man was not an orphan, thrown

destitute, like the shipwrecked sailor, on life,* not knowing whence he came, or what was his destiny; he was not fatherless, the sport and victim of the blind forces of nature, with no living love and care above him, to which he might lift up his heart, and know that he was answered. He was not simply the creature, the servant, the worshipper, the disciple, of the Unapproachable and Invisible, taught by His law, visited in secret by His mysterious whispers to conscience, enlightened and comforted by the Holy Spirit of wisdom and of prophecy—he was thenceforth more than all this—for One had come to open his eyes to the realities of what he was made for, and amid which he lived: One who was like him, and spoke his words, and shared his lot: and He who thus came to him, and whom he saw, and touched, was God: God who made him: God, who from everlasting had been all in all to His creatures. Then, for the first time, he learned, as he had never learned before, what sin was. Then, for the first time, he learned the height and depth of the righteousness

* "Tum porro puer, ut sævis projectus ab undis
Navita, nudus, humi jacet, infans, indigus omni
Vitali auxilio . . .
Quoi tantum in vita restet transire malorum."
Lucret. v.

of God. Then, for the first time, he knew what real forgiveness was. Then, for the first time, he knew what was waiting at the end of mortal life. A new character, not only of fresh moral force, but new altogether in spiritual height and capacity and aspiration, appeared among men; it wrought great things in the world, it was sung by great poets; the character, in all its manifold variations of depth and power and beauty and majesty, of the Christian saint. Beside it, the glory, the real greatness of the heathen hero, took a lower place. Goodness, not strength, became the true measure of action; and "the thoughts of men were widened," from even the mightiest exploits and happiest hours on this scene of time, to the high purpose and noble pains of penitence and self-discipline, and to the ineffable joys of paradise. "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together. . . . For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. . . . Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of curruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

Could man's ideal, even the highest and the the noblest, remain the same, after such announcements as these? Is it conceivable, in the soberest reason, that after such things as these, man should think of himself, of what he is, and what he should be, as he had before? Is it possible to overstate the natural consequences of them? And these things are what all we Christians believe. Nothing which confines man's action and responsibilities to the present can satisfy their claim: nothing—however great, however noble, however urgent, however touching; beyond all, there is the absorbing truth, that this is but a fragment of a life, and not a life complete and finished in itself—only the foreground of an endless perspective: that God our Maker has been with us to direct, to elevate, to save it: that of all man's relations to beings round him, his relations to God his Father are the greatest, to his Incarnate Redeemer, the deepest. Man has still to live his appointed days on earth. He *must* live then according to the conditions, physical, moral, social, which one greater than man has imposed upon him. He *must* live in society, and fulfil the obligations which social and political life imply and require. He *must* render

to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's. He *must*, if his life here is not to be a wreck and a ruin, submit himself to the law of duty, of reason, of conscience: he must tame the wild beast within him, he must crush the dull brute selfishness, which, at the very height of polished civilization, would cut him off from his kind, in a deadly isolation from sympathy and help and love. But beyond all this, he has to think of something else. He has to think of himself, as not of this swiftly passing scene, but as belonging to a vaster system, from which there is no escape by being immersed in the present. He must think not only of those whom he now sees and speaks to, but of those too whom he will meet when he is dead. He must think of himself as taken out of the shows and appearances which each day brings with it, to be a partaker of what is permanent and for ever. He has a pattern to aim at which is not of this world; and that pattern is the life—if we may speak so with reverence—the character of Jesus Christ. He has a fellowship not of this world, and this fellowship is with the Father and with the Son. He has a hope and a fear beyond anything conceivable here—the judgment seat of the Son of Man.

And on these things we are sometimes told that we ought, here in the pulpit, to be silent. We stand before the world, which is not so much disposed as it once was to let us off our profession of this great ideal of human life: and we are bid to realize it and make it good to the full, or else to hold our peace. Or we are told that it is superfluous to preach about these things: that they have been preached about for 1800 years, that every one knows them who cares to know them, and that for the rest they have ceased to have interest; that it is time to attend to the real subjects of the day, to the calls of justice, to the redress of wrongs, to the wants and sufferings of those whose lot in the world is so frightfully unequal. Of course, if these things, the consequences of the Christian creed, are not true, it is not only superfluous to preach about them, but something much worse. But what if we are right in believing them to be true? Can anything be *so* unreasonable, as to believe such things and *not* to speak about them? And, no doubt, it will be a bad day for Christian preaching, when it is not moved by wrong, or forgets the "comfortless trouble's sake of the needy, and the deep sighing of the poor," and "the pa-

tient abiding of the meek." Yes, it is the time—it is *always* the time to do this; it is eminently the time to do it now. But *who* taught us to do this? Where and when did men learn this sympathy with suffering, this impatience of wrong? Who, but He who came to make us sons of God, came also, the first of all, to seek the lost, came, first of all, to preach the Gospel to the poor? Who first taught men to copy His example; and what was it that had power to keep up the tradition of that unearthly example through centuries of selfishness and sin? When for 1800 years men have done without Christ, and have risen to a higher morality and a more disinterested beneficence, it may be time to tell us to do without Him. But that time is certainly not yet. But after all, this is no matter for paper arguments. Arguments have their great place, indispensable and important, but this great debate, which, in one shape or another, has been going on through long ages, and will go on when we all are laid to rest, is not to be settled by them. There the great truths are, for us to take or to leave: with us it rests, whether the true answer shall be given or not, to those who question them. The real, silencing answer

is the lives of men, the lives of Christian believers. The world may talk for ever, and talk to little purpose, about the reality of religion. The question really rests with us: whether our life is governed by such things as we are thinking of to-day: whether, whatever we have to do, the consciousness of their truth is around us like the air we breathe: whether, from believing them, we are more true, more honest, more just, more patient, more pure, more self-denying, more cheerfully helpful, more resigned and patient in trouble. O my brethren, be sure of this—*this*, amid the strife of tongues, is the trustworthy and acceptable way of vindicating the ways of Him who has done so much for us. If only our lives will fairly stand the test which He has intended they should meet, we need not fear when we speak with our enemies in the gate. The Eternal wisdom might if He had pleased, have stopped for ever the mouths of the gainsayer and the doubter. He has not been pleased to do so. He chose His means of victory and salvation, for us, as for Himself, in the realities of a life, in doing and in suffering. May God forgive us for our miserable attempts to bring the life of faith into the life of work and business. May He

forgive us, who accept such great thoughts and hopes, for being content with such poor and intermittent efforts. May God help us to remember that now we are the sons of God, and to discern the import of those tremendous words—"Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man."

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